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ABSTRACT

This anthropological study reports on some of the activities of daily living (ADL's) of 19 Spanish-speaking families living in a low income suburb of Washington, D.C. ADL's are defined as those functions which are performed on a usual day. Generically they include eating, sleeping, communicating, working, and recreating. In this paper, they include child care patterns, household chores, food preparation, and leisure activities. ADL's illustrate the lifestyle of a group, and provide information as to the roles played by family members, relationships within social networks, customs retained from the country of origin, and adaptation to the host country. Some results of the study included the following observations. Most fathers in the sample had some high school education in their country of origin and were employed in skilled or semi-skilled occupations in the U.S. Also, while mothers worked, children were usually cared for by neighbors from the same country of origin or by a grandmother. In addition to an eight-hour day of employment, women had various household chores to accomplish. Food preparation was done by working women or by adolescent girls or grandmothers. Because of the heavy work schedule of most families there was little time for leisure. One of the common leisure activities of the families was watching television. Sunday was the leisure day for most families and included activities such as going to church and attending soccer games. This review of activities of Latin American immigrant families indicates that immigration motives (economic reasons) influenced their work habits, which in turn were related to child care patterns and leisure activities. (Author/AM)

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ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING OF SPANISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS

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Activities of daily living (ADL) are an important aspect of any anthropological research and are particularly relevant to a discussion of health care. There are several reasons for studying these activities. First, it is expected that ADL illustrate the lifestyle of the group and give a glimpse of their priorities. Second, from a study of ADL one also learns about the roles played by family members, relationships within social networks, customs retained from the country of origin as well as adaptations and accommodations which are made by immigrants. Third, research on ADL contributes to our understanding of people's concept of health and illness.

The research reported in this paper was based on a larger study of "The Illness Referral System of Latin American Immigrants" (Ailinger, 1974). ADL are defined as: those functions which are performed on a usual day. Generically they include eating, sleeping, communicating and working and recreating. For the purposes of this paper they include child care patterns, household chores, food preparation and leisure activities.

In this paper I will attempt to delineate some of the activities of daily living of the Spanish-speaking group and relate these to demographic factors, motivation for migration to the U.S. and several aspects of health care.

The research was conducted in a cooperative (Co-op) in a low income suburb of Washington, D.C. At the time of the study over half the Co-op families were of Latin American heritage from nine different Spanish-speaking countries in Central and South America and the Carribean Islands. A combination of approaches including focused interviews, family health calendar recording and participant observation was during the course of the study from February '72 through March '73. The study population consisted of nineteen families with a total of ninety-nine persons in the

households visited forty-six of these were children under eighteen years of age.

It is important in a study of ADL of immigrants to consider their reasons for immigrating since these motives will be reflected in their priorities and activities of daily living.

Economic motives were the most encompassing ones for migration to the United States. More than half the respondents had come to make more money or to get a job. One informant illustrated this point when he said "It was difficult to get ahead in Peru and there was no work available there. It is not good for a man not to work." Although many of the men were employed in skilled manual jobs in their home countries, their salaries were low and they were not getting more then a subsistance level. The women were either employed in jobs where they made very little money or were not employed at all.

Some of the other reasons for migration which respondents declared reflected an economic basis. For example, Mrs. Garcia[1] spoke of a desire to educate her children. In her country of origin she said she could not afford a secondary education for all her children. She commented "One has to have money to educate children in Latin America, whereas in the United States there would be guaranteed free secondary education." Mrs. Somoza stated that the reason she and her family came to the United States was for a "better life".

Four women preceeded their husbands from Central America and three men preceeded their wives from South America. According to Irwin (1972: 18-31)

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[1]All names are fictitious to protect informants.

today women immigrants outnumber men in contrast with the trend in the early part of the century when men dominated as immigrants. Most of the respondents arrived with residents or diplomatic visa. A few had tourist or student visas. The respondents served as links in the chain of migration from Latin America to the United States, about half of the informants or thier spouses had a parent or a sibling in the United States and most of these live in the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. The average time of residence in the United States was 7.7 years for women and 6.3 years for men. Fifteen of the forty-six children were born in the United States. The others arrived in the United States either with one of the parents or after the parents were established here.

At the time of the study families were in social class positions IV and V on the Hollingshead scale (1957). Most fathers had some high school education in their country of origin and were employed in skilled or semi-skilled occupations in the United States. Fathers were all employed full time. Three had 2 full time jobs and three had additional part time jobs, two had sporadic employment in addition to their full time jobs. Most mothers had primary school education and were employed in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the United States. Toward the end of the study all females respondents were gainfully employed and all but one of these was employed outside of her home. Their working patterns were important because they related to child care. Some mothers were home in the morning when children went off to school. Mrs. Alvarez said that she would like to have a job with better pay but the proximity of her present work allows her to be home when children go to school and to be there when they arrive home. Other mothers left for work prior to their children's departure for

school. Mrs. Martinez expressed the view that it was disconcerting to her not to be home because she felt she should be there. However, she was satisfied with her employment condition and said that she had to sacrifice being at home.

Most of the children were driven to school either by a parent or a neighbor. The primary school was located about one mile from the Co-op. Sometimes the driver was a family member while others were only known as the man from X country who drove the children and lived in such and such a house in the area.

While mothers worked, toddlers in the Co-op were usually cared for by neighbors from the same country of origin or by a grandmother. Older siblings, and grandmothers and neighbors were responsible for children who attended nursery and primary school and arrived home early in the afternoon. The availability of child care was one of the advantages cited for staying in the Co-op.

Disciplining children varied with families; corporal punishment was reportedly used on some children. They were strapped on the hands or buttocks or spanked with the belt and sent to their rooms if they do not obey. Threats of spanking were observed; mothers showed the child a strap and threatened to spank them if they did not behave. In other instances, children were ordered to sit in another part of the room away from adults for misbehavior. Children seldom questioned their parents orders.

The woman's work day at her place of employment was typically eight hours with an added 30-60 minutes for transportation. In addition, the women had various household chores to accomplish. The woman's role was to clean and cook. In only two instances men were seen doing the cleaning.

Shopping was sometimes the responsibility of mothers and fathers while in other cases the mothers and children or mothers alone did the food shopping. Most of the Co-op residents bought the bulk of their food at chain stores. However, all of them went to the Latin American grocery market for items they could not purchase elsewhere (for example, yuca, herbs and spices). The market was located about ten blocks from the Co-op and was owned by one of the Co-op residents.

Food preparation was done by either the working women, adolescent girls or grandmothers. Among families traditional Latin American foods, as well as typical U.S. food were found on the tables routinely. Mrs. Pleitez stated that she wished her husband would learn to like American food because it was so much easier to prepare than Latin American food variety. The extent to which traditional food was used varied with the study families. An example of combining the two types of foods was when women who prepared homemade soup in the home country now only prepared it once or twice a week and served canned soup the rest of the time. Depending on the country of origin traditional food was often served daily. For example, the Pulido family ate tortillas everyday. Mrs. Pulido prepared them twice a week and stored them in the freezer. The Vargas family usually included platanos, beans and yuca in their diet.

On special occasions more time was spent in preparing typical food. For example, on Thanksgiving and Christmas and on birthdays the traditional food was often served. The classic example of combining U.S. and Latin food was a combination of tamales and turkey for Thanksgiving. The former is typical of the country of origin and the latter of the U.S. One of the reported reasons why these traditional foods were not prepared more frequently was that they cost more to make in the U.S. and required a great deal of time.

The busy schedule maintained by the family was described in terms of Mrs. Arias' typical day. She reported that she arose at 7 A.M., sent her children off to school and then did her housework. Each day she had a different chore to accomplish and had an organized plan for the week. For example on Tuesday she did her laundry, on Wednesday she vacuumed and on Thursday she did her grocery shopping. Prior to going to work at 4 P.M. she made the evening meal which her husband and children ate about 7 P.M. She left for work at 3:30 P.M. at home and arrived at home at 12:30 A.M.

Because of the heavy work schedule of most families there was little time for leisure. One of the common leisure activities of the Co-op families was watching television. In the evenings mothers, fathers and children were observed in this activity. The amount of television which they watched varied per family. Occasionally women who were home during the day watched the soap operas while they ironed and took care of their children. One woman asked that her interview appointment be scheduled at a time between the soap operas and her departure for work in the afternoon.

Sunday was usually a leisure day for most families and included a variety of activities. On Sunday morning some went to a local Catholic Church two blocks away although the women said they preferred the Spanish mass in Washington, D. C. it was too far to go every Sunday. They did attend that service on special occasions such as Christmas and holidays. Another event on Sunday morning was the arrival of the Baptist Sunday School Bus which transported about 25% of the children to school. All of these children had Catholic parents, many of whom stated they were nonpracticing. Several parents mentioned that the Sunday School provided recreation for

the children and some religious education. They felt that as long as the children learned about God the location did not matter.

Recreational activities on Sunday included soccer games which the men attended. One family belonged to a Latin American soccer club and participated in weekly games. This was the only association mentioned by respondents which met on a regulary basis for sports and fiesta. Another recreational group composed of Peruvians from a particular part of that country held a yearly fiesta party on the feast of their saint. The Co-op residents spent most of their hours of free time with their families. Visiting relatives or friends was another common recreational activity. In addition to family visits they attended the Spanish movie in Washington, D.C.

Birthday parties for children were also held on Sunday. Children danced to rock music while adults chatted about various topics, including the family, children and recent events. The house where the birthday party was held was usually decorated with balloons and streamers. Gifts were brought by all who attended the party and typical Latin food was served along with U.S. food.

In all the homes Spanish was spoken to a greater or less degree. In most homes the parents addressed each other and the children in Spanish. In several homes Guaraini (an Indian language recognized as an official language in Paraguay) was spoken. All but three school age children were bilingual.

From a review of the ADL of the Latin American Immigrant families we can see that their immigration motives influenced their work habits which in turn was related to their child care patterns and leisure activities.

Food preparation had elements of the home country as well as their new cultural context. While access to public health facilities was readily available in English speaking facilities they chose Spanish-speaking health professionals as providers. This reflected their lack of facility with the English language.

Knowledge of these ADL can contribute to our understanding of the choices which these families make in adapting to the new cultural context. It raises research questions for health professionals in meeting their health care needs. It should also suggest interventions which are appropriate in providing culturally relevant health care.

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